



File Code: 1950
Date: November 12, 2015

Dear Planning Participant:

Today I am proud to announce the release of the Proposed Amended Land and Resource Management Plan (Proposed Forest Plan) and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Tongass National Forest. This Proposed Forest Plan will guide management activities on about 17 million acres of National Forest System lands in Southeast Alaska for the next 10 to 15 years. It is the first Proposed Forest Plan and associated DEIS for a Plan Amendment developed under the 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219) released anywhere in the country. I have enclosed a copy of the Proposed Forest Plan and DEIS (hard copy and compact disc) for your review. You may also find these documents online on or before November 20, 2015 located at:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/R10/Tongass/PlanAmend>

The need for change comes from a July 2013 memo from U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Tom Vilsack (Secretary's Memorandum 1044-009) directing the Tongass to transition its forest management program to be more ecologically, socially, and economically sustainable, as well as information generated during the Five-Year Review of the Forest Plan in 2013. An amendment is needed to accelerate the transition to a young-growth forest management program, and to do so in a way that preserves a viable timber industry that provides jobs and opportunities for residents of Southeast Alaska. Changes to the Forest Plan are also needed to make the development of renewable energy resources more permissible, including access and utility corridors to stimulate economic development in Southeast Alaska communities. Changes to the 2008 Forest Plan have been developed under the 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219) and final planning directives. This Proposed Forest Plan represents the Preferred Alternative (Alternative 5) and is based on recommendations of the Tongass Advisory Committee, a Federal Advisory Committee established by USDA to advise the Secretary and Chief of the Forest Service on transitioning the Tongass National Forest to young-growth forest management.

Highlights of the Proposed Forest Plan include:

1. The Transportation and Utility System overlay Land Use Designations (LUD) was removed as well as all associated direction (i.e., "window" and "avoidance area") in the LUD Standards and Guidelines pertaining to application of this overlay LUD.
2. A new chapter (Chapter 5) adds applicable plan direction related to Young Growth, Renewable Energy, and Transportation Systems Corridors and other direction that applies to the entire plan area (forest-wide) or to specific Land Use Designations (LUDs).
3. The Priority of Direction (Chapter 1) was modified to change the priority of direction with respect to the new plan direction in Chapter 5.
4. Identification of lands as not suitable and suitable for timber production (Appendix A) was updated to meet the requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219.11).



The Environmental Protection Agency will publish a Notice of Availability (NOA) for the DEIS in the Federal Register which is anticipated on November 20, 2015. Publication of the NOA in the Federal Register begins a 90-day public comment period on both the Proposed Forest Plan and DEIS. Comments on the DEIS are most helpful if they are specific and address the adequacy of the DEIS and the merits of the alternatives discussed. It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period.

Submit written comments to: Forest Supervisor, Tongass National Forest, Attn: Forest Plan Amendment, 648 Mission Street, Ketchikan, AK 99901. Comments may also be submitted via email to: comments-alaska-tongass@fs.fed.us, or via facsimile to (907) 228-6292.

Public meetings and subsistence hearings will be scheduled in many communities during the 90-day comment period. The basic format of these events will be an open house display of project-related information and discussions, followed by formal Subsistence Hearings under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), where individuals can provide testimony surrounding the alternatives and the proposed amendments relative to the effect of subsistence uses on the Tongass National Forest. The location and schedule of these public meetings and hearings can be found on the project website.

The final decision will be subject to a pre-decisional administrative review process; commonly referred to as the objection process. The Forest Service's objection process provides an opportunity to have any unresolved concerns reviewed by the Forest Service prior to a final decision by the Responsible Official. Objections will be accepted only from those who have previously submitted substantive formal comments (36 CFR 219.62) during an opportunity for public participation provided during the planning process, (36 CFR parts 219.4 and 219.16) and attributed to the individual or entity providing them.

If you need additional information, please contact Susan Howle, Project Manager, at 907-228-6340.

Sincerely,



M. EARL STEWART
Forest Supervisor, Tongass NF